

Worksheet: Making a Plan to Improve Scaffolding

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1. Think of a challenging assignment where you think student learning could be better supported. What is the main learning objective that this assignment addresses?

2. Make a list of how student learning in this assignment is currently supported (see reverse for examples).
 - a. Built-In Support

 - b. Contingent Support

3. How does this existing support help students meet the primary learning objective?

4. Can you add something new, or modify something that is already being done, to better support student learning? Talk with your neighbours and brainstorm some ideas!

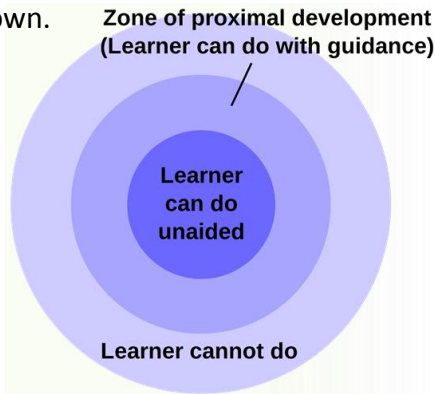
Improved Support	Addresses the Learning Objective by...

5. Pick your favourite idea and make a plan! What resources do you need in order to provide this support to your students? What's your timeline?

Scaffolding in the Literature

What is the role of scaffolding in teaching and learning? What does scaffolding look like? The literature gives us a couple of different ways to frame these questions and their answers.

According to Vygotsky (1978), the best learning occurs when students are working in the Zone of Proximal Development. In this model scaffolding provided by instructors helps students to do more than they can on their own.



Originally outlined by Mezirow (1991), the dichotomies of low and high Challenge and Support is another way to talk about the role of scaffolding/support in teaching (modified from Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

Level of Challenge	High	ANXIETY frustration	GROWTH engagement
	Low	STAGNATION pointlessness boredom	DEPENDENCY busy work dumbed down
		Low	High
Level of Support			

But what does support look like? Wilson and Devereux (2014) make a distinction between Built-In and Contingent support, and they argue that both are needed. But our experience with the case-study assignment also tells us that the kind of built-in and contingent support is also extremely important.

Built-In Scaffolding: Support built into the assignment itself. Often designed to catch and correct misconceptions from the start. Helps motivate students to persevere with challenging tasks.

- Clear Learning Objectives
- Clear Big-Picture Importance
- Explicit Instructions
- Marking Rubric
- Provide Example Answers
- Students Work in Groups
- Multiple Similar Assignments
- Instructor Approval of Assignment Topics
- Handing-in/Marking of Outlines/Drafts

Contingent Scaffolding: Support that is not planned, but offered as needed. As such, it relies on in-the-moment interactions between teachers and students. Often addresses issues not covered by built-in scaffolding, but can also be used to make connections to prior knowledge, draw concepts together, and highlight key points.

- Student-Student (e.g. Online Discussion)
- One-on-One In-class (e.g. Hand Raising)
- Individual Written Feedback

References

- Mezirow (1991) Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wilson & Devereux (2014) Scaffolding theory: High challenge, high support in Academic Language and Learning (ALL) contexts. J. Acad. Lang. & Learn. 8(3):A91-A100
- Vygotsky (1978) Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press